

A STATEMENT BY GOVERNOR WILLIAM B. UMSTEAD

May 27, 1954

When Governor Holden submitted the Fourteenth Amendment to the Legislature of this State for ratification he told the General Assembly that the Amendment could not prevent the states from operating separate schools for the white and colored races. He recommended the ratification of the Amendment, after having written several articles in his newspaper, THE RALEIGH SENTINEL, in which he assured the people of the State that the ratification would not in any way interfere with the separation of the races in the public schools. At the same session, the General Assembly of 1868, when the Fourteenth Amendment was ratified, he recommended the enactment of legislation providing for separate schools for white and colored children of the State. In 1875, upon the return of the Democrats to power, a constitutional amendment was adopted providing for the separation of schools without discrimination against either race. In 1896, in PLESSY v. FERGUSON, the Supreme Court of the United States, with only one dissenting Justice, interpreted the Fourteenth Amendment as meaning that the states had a right to provide separate but equal facilities in the public schools. In other Supreme Court decisions since that time, the Court has unanimously recognized the principle of separate but equal facilities in public education.

Acting in accordance with the clear provisions of the North Carolina Constitution and in accordance with the decisions of the Supreme Court of the United States and every available historical precedent, this State and many others, since 1868, has provided separate schools for our white and colored children. Under this program, the State, counties, school districts, have invested millions and millions of dollars in providing facilities in a sincere effort to accommodate the tremendous demands of public education in our State system of public schools, based upon the heretofore recognized principle of separate but equal facilities. The recent expenditures for public school buildings have gone far to substantially equalize the school buildings available to both races.

Teachers' salaries have been fully equalized and great efforts have been made to comply with our constitutional requirements.